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IAN HIDEO LEVY

The Ten Thousand Leaves

A TRANSLATION OF THE

Man'yōshū,

JAPAN'S PREMIER

ANTHOLOGY OF

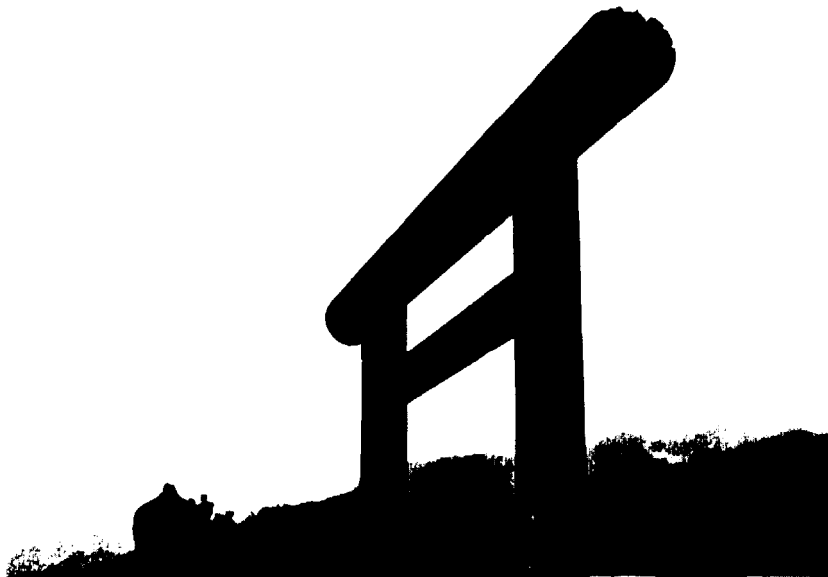
CLASSICAL POETRY

VOLUME ONE



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BY THE AUTHOR

The road alongside the mountains
(Yamanohe no michi)

POEMS ON VARIOUS THEMES

THE REIGN OF EMPEROR YŪRYAKU, WHO RULED
THE REALM UNDER HEAVEN FROM THE ASAKURA
PALACE IN HATSUSE (456-479)

Poem by the Emperor

Girl with your basket,
with your pretty basket,
with your shovel,
with your pretty shovel,
gathering shoots on the hillside here.
I want to ask your home.
Tell me your name!
This land of Yamato,
seen by the gods on high—
it is all my realm,
in all of it I am supreme.
I will tell you
my home and my name.

THE REIGN OF EMPEROR JOMEI, WHO RULED
THE REALM UNDER HEAVEN FROM THE
OKAMOTO PALACE AT TAKECHI (629-642)

2

*Poem by the Emperor when he climbed Kagu Hill
to view the land*

Many are the mountains of Yamato,
but I climb heavenly Kagu Hill
that is cloaked in foliage,
and stand on the summit
to view the land.

On the plain of land,
smoke from the hearths rises, rises.

On the plain of waters,
gulls rise one after another.
A splendid land
is the dragonfly island,¹
the land of Yamato.

3 and 4

*Poem which Princess Nakatsu bud Hashrhito Oyu
present when the Emperor went hunting
on the fields of Uchi*

Our Lord, sovereign
of the earth's eight corners,
in the morning

¹ "Dragonfly island" (*akitsushima*). The *Kojiki* "explains" this traditional epithet for Yamato with the incident, recorded during an excursion to Yoshino by Emperor Yuryaku in which the Emperor was bitten by a horsefly, which was in turn devoured by a dragonfly.

held and caressed
his catalpa bow.
In the evening
he stood beside it.
I can hear its golden tips resound.
Now he must be setting out
on his morning hunt.
Now he must be setting out
on his evening hunt.
I can hear the golden tips
of his catalpa bow resound.

Envoy

Lining his steeds
on the plain of Uchi,
he must be walking
over morning fields—
those fields so rank with grass!

5 and 6

*Poem written by Prince Ikusa as he looked at the
mountains where the Emperor had gone on his
procession to Aya County in the land of Sanuki*

Not even knowing
if the long spring day
has drawn through its mist
into evening,
my heart,
these twines of inner flesh,
in pain,

135

II.

At Cape **Kara**²
 on the Sea of **Iwami**,
 where the vines
 crawl on the rocks,
rockweed of the deep
 grows on the reefs
 and sleek seaweed
 grows on the desolate shore.
 As deeply do I
 think of my wife
 who swayed toward me in sleep
 like the lithe seaweed.
 Yet few were the nights
 we had slept together
 before we were parted
 like crawling vines uncurled.
 And so I look back,
 still thinking of her
 with painful heart,
 this clench of inner flesh,
 but in the storm
 of fallen scarlet leaves
 on Mount Watari,
 crossed as on
 a great ship,
 I cannot make out the sleeves
 she waves in farewell.

²Preceding "Cape Kara" is an untranslatable epithet, "koto saeku." "Kara" also means "China," and the epithet's meaning. "babbling words," refers to the incomprehensible foreign tongue. This is a purely formal pillow-word—a pun—and has nothing to do with the place Cape Kara itself.

For she, alas,
 is slowly hidden
 like the moon
 in its crossing
 between the clouds
 over Yagami Mountain
 just as the evening sun
 coursing through the heavens
 has begun to glow,
 and even I
 who thought I was a brave man
 find the sleeves
 of my well-woven robe
 drenched with tears.

136 and 137

Envoys

The quick gallop
 of my dapple-blue steed
 races me to the clouds,
 passing far away
 from where my wife dwells.

O scarlet leaves
 falling on the autumn mountainside:
 stop, for a while, the storm
 your strewing makes, that I might glimpse
 the place where my wife dwells.

wilting
 like the summer grass,
 staggering
 like an evening star,
 reeling
 like a great boat,
 we cannot console ourselves,
 we do not know what to do.
 At least let us remember,
 if only the sound,
 if only the name,
 forever far and long
 as heaven and earth.
 Ten thousand ages
 to the Asuka River
 that bears the name
 of our beloved Princess:
 her memento,
 it is here.

197 and 198

Tanka

If they had piled branches
 across the Asuka River
 to stop its course,
 even the streaming waters
 would have become quiet.

Asuka, river of
 “tomorrow’s fragrance”:
 hoping, but in vain, to meet her
 at least tomorrow, I cannot forget
 my Princess’ name.

199

*Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro at the time of the
 temporary enshrinement of Prince Takechi at Kinoe*

with tanka

I hesitate to put it in words,
 it is an awesome thing to speak.
 Our Lord,
 who, while we trembled,
 fixed the far and heavenly
 halls of his shrine
 on the fields of Makami in Asuka
 and, godlike, has secluded himself
 in the rocks there,
 he,
 who ruled the earth’s eight corners,
 crossed Fuwa Mountain,
 lined with thick black pines,
 in the northern land of his realm
 and went down,
 as from heaven,
 to the provinces,
 encamping on the plain of Wazami,
 Wazami
 of the Korean swords.
 To hold sway over the realm under heaven
 and bring his dominions to peace,
 he gathered his soldiers
 in the eastern country,
 where the cock cries,
 and gave the task to his son,
 he being an imperial prince:

borne away.
 Loftily he raises
 the palace at Kinoe,
 good of hempen cloth,
 as his eternal shrine.
 A god, his soul is stilled there.
 Yet could we even Imagine
 that his palace by Kagu Hill
 will pass away
 in the ten thousand generations
 he intended as he built?
 I turn to gaze on it
 as I would on the heavens,
 bearing it in my heart
 like a strand of jewels,
 preciously remembering,
 awesome though it be.

200 and 201

Envoys

Although you rule
 the far heavens now,
 we go on longing for you,
 unmindful of the passing
 of sun and moon.

Not knowing where they will drift,
 like the hidden puddles that run
 on the banks of Haniyasu Pond,
 the servingmen stand bewildered.

202

One book has for an envoy,

Offering him sacred wine,
 we pray at the shrine of Nakisawa,
 the marsh of tears.
 But our Lord is gone
 to rule the high heavens.

In the Forest of Classified Verse, the above poem is said to be “by Princess Hinokuma, in her anger at the Nakisawa Shrine (for the Prince’s absence).” The *Nihonshoki* states that the later Crown Prince, Takechi, died in autumn, on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the tenth year of the reign (696).

203

Poem by Prince Hozumi crying in sorrow on a winter day after the death of Princess Tajima, as he looked out through the falling snow toward her grave

Falling snow,
 do not fall so hard.
 Do not be a barrier to my sight
 of Ikai Hill in Yonabari.

248

Another poem by Prince Nagata

Today I saw the Satsuma Channel,
 Satsuma
 of the wild Hayato men,
 distant as the dwelling of the clouds.

249-256

Eight poems of travel by Kakinomoto Hitomaro

249

Fearing the billows
 off Cape Mitsu,
 you have passed the night by the island
 on your boat in the hidden cove.¹

250

Passing Minume,
 where they cut the sleek seaweed,
 our boat has drawn near Cape Noshima,
 rank with summer grass.

A variant has,

Passing Otome,
 where they cut the sleek seaweed,
 I build my temporary lodge
 on Cape Noshima,
 rank with summer grass.

¹ This translation is based on a reading of the last two phrases of the original poem as *funa naru kimi wa / yadorimu shima ni*, one of a dozen possible readings of the obscure characters 舟公官奴嶋余

251

At Cape Noshima in Awaji,
 the cords of my sleeves
 that my wife tied for me
 are blown backward in the beach wind.

252

Do they see me as a fisher
 catching perch in Fujie Cove,
 of the hempen cloth,
I who journey?

A variant has,

Do they see me as a fisher
 angling in Fujie Cove,
 of the white cloth,
 I who journey?

253

Even as **I** think how hard it is
 to leave behind the fields of Inabi,
 the island of Kago,
 for which my heart yearns,
 comes into sight.

254

Will I part rowing to the sun
 that sinks into the Akashi Straits,
 bright with lampfires,
 the land of home beyond my sight?

255

Over a long road,
 from barbarian lands
 at the far reach of the heavens,
 I have come, yearning.
 And now the Straits of Akashi
 open on the island, Yamato.

A variant has,

open on the land of my home

256

The surface of the sea at Kehi
 looks peaceful; I can see,
 bobbling out in confusion
 like rushes scythed from roots,
 the boats of fishermen.

A variant has,

The surface of the sea at Muko
 looks peaceful; I can see,
 above the waves,
 the boats of angling fishermen.

257

Poem about Kagu Hill by Lord Kamo Taruhito

with tanka

When spring comes,
 with rising mists,

to heavenly Kagu Hill,
 descended
 from the firmament,
 the wind in the pines
 raises waves on the pond,
 and darkening leaves
 thicken on the cherry trees.
 On the offing
 the lone duck cries for its mate,
 by the shore
 the spotted ducks flock and rustle.
 Courtiers of the great palace,
 its ramparts
 thick with stone,
 have taken their leave;
 oars and poles
 are gone from the boats,
 and it is lonely,
 with no one there to row them.

258 and 259

Two envoys

And I can clearly see
 that the boats lie unrowed,
 for the diving mandarin and the teal
 have made them their home.

When did Kagu's halberd cedar
 turn so venerably aged
 that moss spreads on its roots?

336

Poem by the Priest Mansei about floss-silk

He was the imperial attendant who
 built the Kannonji Temple in
 Tsukushi. His lay name was Kasa
 Maro.

Keeping it with me,
 I have yet to put it on.
 But it looks warm,
 this floss-silk from Tsukushi.

337

Poem by Yamanoue Okura, upon leaving a banquet

Okura shall take his leave now.
 My child must be crying
 and its mother,
 who bears it on her back,
 must be waiting for me.

338-350

*Thirteen poems in praise of wine by Lord Ōtomo
 Tabito, the Commander of the Dazaiфу*

338

Rather than engaging
 in useless worries,
 it's better to down a cup
 of raw wine.

339

Great sages of the past
 gave the name of "sage" to wine.
 How well they spoke!

340

What the Seven Wise Men
 of ancient times
 wanted, it seems,
 was wine.

341

Rather than making pronouncements
 with an air of wisdom,
 it's better to down the wine
 and sob drunken tears.

342

What is most noble,
 beyond all words
 and beyond all deeds,
 is wine.

343

Rather than be half-heartedly human,
 I wish I could be a jug of wine
 and be soaked in it!

344

How ugly!
 those men who,
 with airs of wisdom,
 refuse to drink wine.
 Take a good look,
 and they resemble apes.

345

How could even
 a priceless treasure
 be better than a cup
 of raw wine?

346

How could even a gem
 that glitters in the night
 be as good as drinking wine
 and cleansing the heart?

347

Here in this life,
 on these roads of pleasure,
 it is fun to sob drunken tears.

348

As long **as I have fun**
 in this life,
let me be an Insect or a bird
 in the next.

349

Since all who live
 must finally die,
 let's have fun
 while we're still alive.

350

Smug and silent airs of wisdom
 are still not as good
 as downing a cup of wine
 and sobbing drunken tears.

351

Poem by the Priest Mansei

To what shall **I** compare
 this life?
 the way a boat
 rowed out from the morning harbor
 leaves no traces on the sea.

456

Longing for you,
 there is nothing I can do,
 so, like the cranes
 among the reeds,
 I weep and cry aloud
 in the morning and the evening.

457

Lord whom I thought I would serve
 far into the distant future,
 you are no more,
 and my heart has lost its bearing.

458

Crawling like a baby,
 I weep, and I cry aloud
 in the morning and the evening,
 now that you, my Lord, are gone.

The above five poems were written
 by Tabito's servant, YoMyōgun,
 who loved his master as a dog or
 horse would, unable to repress the
 emotions in his heart.

459

My Lord, I never tired
 to look upon you
 while you were alive;
 such sadness now that you are gone
 like the scattered leaves of autumn.

Agatanoinukai Hitogami,
 Administrator of the Board of Inner
 Ceremonies, was ordered to minister
 to Lord Ōtomo's illness. But the
 medicine had no effect. Running
 water cannot be stopped-the Lord
 died. Agatanoinukai, grief-struck over
 this, wrote the above poem.

460

Poem by Lady Ōtomo Sakanoue in the seventh year of
Tempyō (735), grieving over the death of the nun
Rigwan

with tanka

Hearing that this
 is a good land,
 she came from Silla,
 land of mulberry-woven nets,
 and crossed to Japan,
 where she had no relations,
 no brothers and sisters to talk to.
 The sun-blessed capital
 of our Lord's realms
 is packed with many quarters and houses,
 but-what could have been
 in her mind?—

she was drawn,
 like a weeping child
 to its parents,
 to the Saho mountainside,
 so foreign to her.
 There she built a house
 where she could place
 her well-woven pillow,
 and has dwelled there
 through the long years.
 But she could not escape
 the fact that all who live
 must die;
 while everyone she depended on
 was away on a journey,
 with grass for pillows,
 she crossed the Saho River
 in the morning
 and, glancing back
 on the fields of Kasuga,
 disappeared toward the mountainside
 as one fades
 into the gathering darkness of evening,
 There is nothing I can say,
 nothing I can do,
 so I wander
 all alone
 without a moment
 to dry my white mourning robes—
 do these tears
 I cry in my grief
 trail as clouds over Arima Mountain
 and fall as rain?

461

Envoy

Life's course cannot be stopped,
 and so she is gone
 out from the house
 where she kept her well-woven pillow,
 and is hidden in the clouds.

The above refer to a nun from Silla
 in Korea, her name Rigwan. She felt
 our ruler's virtue from afar, and came
 to our holy realm and was
 naturalized. She lived in the home of
 Lord Ōtomo Yasumaro, Chancellor
 and Commander of the Army, and
 had been there for some years when,
 in the seventh year of Tempyō (735),
 she suddenly came down with a fatal
 disease, and was soon away to the
 realm of the dead. At this time Lady
 Ishikawa was at the hot springs of
 Arima for her cure, and was unable
 to attend the funeral. Her daughter,
 however, asked that she be allowed
 to interrupt her journey and go alone
 to perform the obsequies. Thus she
 wrote this poem and sent it to her
 mother at the hot springs.

462

*Poem written by Ōtomo Yakamochi in summer, the
 sixth month, of the eleventh year of Tempyō (739), in
 his grief over his dead concubine*

Soon the autumn winds
 will be blowing coldly;
 how can I sleep
 through the long nights alone?

886 and 891

Six poems respectfully presented in response to Asada Yasu's, expressing Kumakori's intention for him

By Yamanoue Okura, the Governor of Chikuzen

Preface

Ōtomo Kumakori was a man of Mashiki County in the province of Higo. At the age of eighteen, on the seventeenth day of the sixth month of the third year of Temyō (731), he became a retainer in the service of the governor of that province, who had been appointed Bearer of the *Sumō* Wrestlers, and set off for the capital. But—could it have been Heaven's will?—unfortunately he contracted a disease on the road, and died at the Takaba horse station in Saeki County in the province of Aki.

Just before his death Kumakori gave a long sigh and said, "I have heard it recounted that, 'Man's body, a temporary assemblage of the elements, is easily destroyed, and the course of life, like bubbles on the water, is hard to hold back.' Thus the thousand saints have all passed away, and the hundred sages could not remain in this world. How, then, could a mere common **man like** myself, of mean station, possibly escape from death? But I am concerned about my aged parents, both of them alive in their humble hut, who pass their days waiting for my return. Naturally their hearts will be rent with grief. If I do not return when they expect me to, **I** know their tears will be enough to blind them. O my father, how sorrowful for you! O my mother, how painful for you! It **does** not bother me that **I** myself must tread the road of death. I only lament the hardships my parents will face when they are **left** behind without me. Today we must part for eternity—in what life will we ever meet again?"

Kumakori then composed six poems, and died. The poems:

886

To go up to the palace
swept with sunlight,
I left my mother's arms,
my mother
with her milk-full breasts,
and set out for the depths
of lands **I** have never known,
and crossed beyond
a hundred folds of mountains.
Talking with my companions
and wondering how soon
I could set my eyes
on the capital—
then pain struck my body,
I collapsed
on a corner of the road—
road like a jewelled spear—
and, plucking grass
and spreading gromwell
for my bed,
I lay down,
and as I lay
I sighed with longing:
If I were in my homeland,
my father would hold and nurse me;
if I were in my **house**,
my mother would hold and nurse me.
The world, it seems,
comes but to **this**—
must I end my life
falling by the roadside
like a dog?

887

In which direction will I leave,
 my soul darkened,
 parting from my mother,
 with her milk-full breasts,
 unable to meet her eyes?

888

How can I make my way
 through the darkness
 down the long road
 I have never known?
 I have no provisions.

889

If I were home
 and my mother held
 and nursed me,
 it would soothe my heart,
 even-if I must—
 were I to die.

890

O my father and mother
 who must be waiting for me,
 counting the days
 since I went away
 and thinking, "Today! Today!"

891

Must I depart for eternity,
 leaving behind
 my father and mother,
 whom I can never see
 twice in a single lifetime?²⁵

892

Dialog of the Destitute

with tanka

"On nights when rain falls,
 mixed with wind,
 on nights when snow falls,
 mixed with rain,
 I am cold.
 And the cold
 leaves me helpless:
 I lick black lumps of salt
 and suck up melted dregs of rake.
 Coughing and sniffing,
 I smooth my uncertain wisps
 of heard,
 I am proud—
 I know no man
 is better than me.
 But I am cold.
 I pull up my hempen nightclothes
 and throw on every scrap

²⁵If read literally, this poem seems redundant. But "whom I can never see/twice in a single lifetime" is a quasi-epithetical modification of "my father and mother," operating like a formal (i.e., non-semantic) "pillow-word."

When I hear the news
that the imperial craft
has berthed at Naniwa Cove,
I shall run to greet you,
my waistcord trailing loose.

*On the third month, first day, of the fifth year of
Temptyō, you visited me at my borne. I present
you this on the third.*

*From Yamanoue Okura, with humility
To His Excellency the Ambassador to China*

An essay lamenting his own long illness

By Yamanoue Okura

In my private thoughts it occurs to me that even those men who obtain their livelihood by hunting, morning and evening, on the mountains and the plains are able to make their way through life without calamity (I speak of those who, with bow and arrow in their hands, ignoring the six fasting days on which the taking of life is forbidden, slay every animal they come across, regardless of young or old, pregnant or not). Even those who fish day and night in the rivers and on the sea are vouchsafed their fortune and their safe passage through life (I speak of the fisherman and the diving woman, each with his or her effort of work, the man clutching his bamboo pole who angles skillfully over the waves, the woman, with scythe and basket tied to her waist, who dives into the sea to pluck life from the depths).

But I, since the day I was born until today, have intended to do only good deeds and have had no thoughts of doing evil (I have followed the teachings "to eschew the various evil deeds" and "to perform the various good deeds"). I

have revered the Three Treasures—Buddha, Law, and Priesthood-, foregoing not a day of effort (reading the sutras every day and atoning for my sins). I have venerated the myriad deities, neglecting not an evening (doing homage to the various deities of heaven and earth). Oh how shameful! What crime have I committed, that I should meet with this dreadful disease! (Is this for past crimes, or is it the result of present transgressions? How could I, who am innocent of sin, be struck down with this illness?)

Many are the months and years since I first contracted this disease (it has been more than ten years). I am presently seventy-four years old. My hair is spotted with white, and my muscles have lost their strength. And now to the sufferings of old age, now to those burdens has been added this affliction of sickness. This is what the proverbs must mean when they speak of pouring salt into a painful wound, of cutting off the edges of a stick already too short. I cannot move my four limbs, my hundred joints all ache, my body feels terribly heavy, as if I were carrying a load of a hundred and fifty pounds.²⁶ Clutching a strip of cloth, I try to pull myself up, only to collapse like a bird with broken wings. Leaning on my cane and trying to walk, I am like an old donkey whose legs are gone.

My body is sunk deeply in the vulgar, and my heart is tainted with the dirt of this world. Therefore I wished to know where affliction lurks and where the curse of retribution is hidden. I went to inquire at every sorcerer's gate, to every shaman's chamber. Whether true or false, I followed all their instructions, never failing to hang prayer cloths and offer invocations. But the pangs of disease only

²⁶The original text has "kinseki" (鈔斤), a curious combination of two different weights. This is followed by an interlinear note which, going through the various weight equivalents in use at the time, concludes, "four kin (鈔) equal one jaku (斤), all together 120 kon (斤)." This would be 158.4 pounds.